Juiced.GS

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Remembering Tony

My Home Page

Remembering Tony

It was Monday, October 11, 2004. I had a few minutes between classes—not long enough to grade papers or prepare lesson plans for my 11th-grade students, but enough time to stop by my office and check my email. I figured there'd be nothing important that would require much attention.

What I found instead was an email from Tony Diaz that started me worrying but left me relieved.

Tony was emailing the KansasFest committee, of which I was a part and he was the chair. We had held the event at Avila University just a few months earlier, and the dates for KansasFest 2005 had already been announced. This time of year was usually a lull for the committee, as we were still several months away from registration opening. It turned out the past month had been anything but quiet for Tony.

On September 16, he'd received a voicemail from Avila informing him they would no longer be hosting summer conferences—including KansasFest. As soon as he got the news, Tony hit speed dial to call Sean Fahey. They brainstormed, they researched, and they identified two alternative venues. As quickly as they could, they secured their first choice—Rockhurst University—for the same dates we'd already committed to for KansasFest 2005. By the time the rest of us found out KansasFest had been homeless, it already had a new home.

When Tony first got that voicemail, he could've emailed the entire committee, leaving us frantic to find a solution. But Tony knew this wasn't a problem that needed to be crowdsourced; it was something he could solve, with just a bit of help.

It wasn't with arrogance or ego that Tony tackled that problem, but with confidence born from experience. He had been the KansasFest committee chair for a few years at that point, and in that same email to us, he confided: "When I took over the job, I was afraid I would suck at it. But having been to all of the [KansasFests], I figured I knew enough of what to do. I was also worried that I would not be able to 'attend' KFest, having to deal with it instead. That didn't turn out to be the case. It fit in very well, and for that I have to thank those committee members that attended."

Over the next few decades, the challenges Tony shouldered grew larger and more numerous. Organizing KansasFest, managing the online storefronts Syndicomm and 16Sector, maintaining the backend of A2Central.com, writing for *Juiced.GS*, his own unrealized ambition to launch an Apple II podcast—Tony loved this community to the point of overcommitting to it.

I think many of us are acquainted with the embarrassment that comes not only from not living up to other people's expectations, but failing to live up to our own. That feeling can make it hard to remember that, just like with the KansasFest committee, we all have friends here. There have been times I've been frustrated with Tony—but I also know, if he had asked any of us for help with his projects, we would've leapt at the chance. Despite his shortcomings, he accomplished much, and he had potential still for more.

Sadly, Tony passed away unexpectedly on October 27 at the age of 54. My feelings when I heard the news were as complex as my relationship with Tony. But I'm choosing to remember the Tony who saved KansasFest. For as much as Tony felt he owed us, we owe him at least that much.

Ken Gagne
Editor-in-Chief

Memories of Tony Diaz

A friend for life

Anthony Mario Diaz, former staff writer for* Juiced.GS*, passed away on October 27, 2021, at the age of 54. Over the decades, Tony held a variety of roles in the Apple II community: he was a hardware developer, the KansasFest committee chair, an online community organizer, and proprietor of Apple II businesses Syndicomm and 16Sector. Despite (or perhaps because of) his complex relationships with members of the community, he will be missed, as reflected in his friends' memories of him.

Sean McNamara

I, like many others in the Apple II community, was shocked and saddened by the sudden passing of Tony Diaz in late October.

I first met Tony at Oz KFest 2015 in Melbourne, Australia, and took an instant liking to him—he had a ready laugh, appreciated Aussie humor, and took any ribbing I sent his way.

When you listened to Tony speak, with the knowledge and stories he shared, you could tell he was no mere "hobbyist"—he was willing to share with enthusiasts like myself without any apparent sense of superiority or hubris.

He had been deeply involved with many Apple-related companies back in the day, helped run KansasFest when things were looking grim, and even helped recover Jordan Mechner's Prince of Persia source code from floppies with Jason Scott, amongst many other efforts and achievements.

The material he displayed, especially the prototypes he owned and the intimate knowledge he had of their origins, design, and designers, coupled with the fact he had so often been in a position to acquire such rare pieces and their stories, showed to those who knew him how the term "hobbyist" doesn't begin to do him justice.

I understand why some were dissatisfied with his inability to maintain good customer service—but I will also say I understand what it's like to fall far short of expectations (including my own) and to want to try to make things good while also being deeply embarrassed about being in such a position.

Committee chair: *Tony made KansasFest happen —and Tony made KansasFest unforgettable.*

I will not judge Tony harshly on this, because he was not a bad man; I believe he was trapped in a spiral of so wanting to achieve perfection in every project he involved himself in, while being all too human and falling short of such an aim, as many of us do.

Tony's willingness to just shoot the breeze about the Apple II (and In-n-Out Burger!), drop by for virtual WOzFests and in person Oz KFests (he was the reason I started WOzFest—see Volume 21, Issue 2 for that story), and his deep enthusiasm for enthusiasts will always be fondly remembered by me and the many Aussie friends he had, and we will miss him dearly the next time we gather.

Sean Fahey

I met Tony in 1998 during my first KansasFest. Even before then, I was familiar with his reputation online as a preeminent member of the Apple II community. He was part nerd, part wizard. His

knowledge of all things Apple and his expertise at repairing and modifying vintage gear was legendary. Tony was a collector, an archivist, a programmer, and a reclassification activist. Many of his projects continue to benefit the Apple II community today.

When I attended KansasFest that first time, Tony was among those who welcomed me. Eventually, due to our similar backgrounds and common interests, we became friends. Our friendship was complicated at times; it had its ups and downs over the years. We collaborated on several projects, clashed and argued over others, but he always had my respect.

I will miss seeing him at KansasFest. It won't be quite the same without his laughter and all the shenanigans he was known for. Fly free, my friend. Apple II Forever.

Eric Shepherd

Tony had a loud, often boisterous personality that belied his serious and thoughtful side. We shared a history of pain, both physical and emotional, and often commiserated on this when things were otherwise quiet. He was someone with whom I could share my growing anxiety and irritation about my mounting health issues, and who understood the regret and self-reproach brought on by my compounding inability to accomplish all the things people expect of me. These were experiences we shared, and we were able to provide each other support for them.

Tony delighted not just in solving problems and explaining solutions to people, but on stumping fellow experts or confounding our expectations. A particularly memorable example was his discovery of a crashing, show-stopping bug in Wolfenstein 3D for the Apple IIGS just a few hours before its expected midnight launch on Valentine's Day 1998. I found a fix in time, got the updated game to everyone to keep testing at around 10 PM, and Tony (and everyone else) agreed at around 11 PM that everything was good to go. The game went live for download two minutes before midnight. But ever since then, every time Tony tested projects for me, we would laugh about this and hope he didn't find another last-second showstopper.

I'll miss Tony. Not just for his knowledge and expertise as an Apple II hardware wizard and collector, but for his humor and warmth as well as his understanding of the problems we shared as members of an upper echelon of Apple II experts with personal issues getting in the way of promised projects.

My final message to Tony:

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0300: AD 14 03 D0 06 A9 14 8D
0308: 01 03 60 20 ED FD EE 01
0310: 03 4C 00 03 C6 C1 D2 C5
0318: D7 C5 CC CC AC A0 D4 CF
0320: CE D9 00
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Em Maginnis

The last time I saw Tony wasn't at an Apple II function. My partner and I had spent most of the last week or two moving into a new apartment, and we were exhausted and hungry. Tony messaged me earlier in the week; he would be driving through Denver and was wondering if I'd have a couple of hours free? We could geek out over my latest Apple III acquisition or take a quick visit to the Wings Over the Rockies museum on the old Lowry Air Force Base campus—one of his favorite local destinations.

But my partner and I were exhausted; I told him we'd be going to a nearby sushi restaurant, and he could join us if he pleased, but that was all we had energy for. My tone was short and lacking in patience, but he came along anyway. Anyone who knows Tony knows that his culinary tastes run more along the lines of a late-night burger and fries or KC Masterpiece BBQ than raw fish, so he opted out of ordering anything more than a Coke. He spent the evening attempting to interest my partner in our hobby and sharing stories of his latest travels, politely ignoring our dour and unpleasant tone. In fact, looking back, it's easy to see that we were downright rude, an attitude I will always regret.

And that was the thing about Tony that stands out for me—quick with a smile, patient and enthusiastic with even the simplest Apple II technical questions that he had to repeatedly answer at every KansasFest. I remember him as helpful and friendly, answering my clueless soldering questions or working on someone's bog-standard generic, $10 eBay Apple IIe. At KansasFest, or taking a break from the road for a quick dinner and story, I feel like I was just beginning to know Tony a little better. I'll miss the times I had with him.

Richard Bennett

Landing in Carlsbad via LAX from Sydney in a turboprop Dash 8, beautifully outfit, engines purring as the blades slowed to a stop, I grabbed my overhead and moved quickly through the terminal. Walking a line of Cessnas, I found Tony with his new plane… with no front—just a cabin with wings. He'd disassembled the engine and laid the hundreds of pieces neatly on a clean white sheet. He assured me that it would be back together the next morning.

This was Tony to a T—messing with new hardware, preparing for adventure, and looking after a friend. In 2003, he, Andrew Roughan, and I got lost flying over the Grand Canyon. Being low on fuel, we made an emergency landing in the Navajo Nation. He didn't skip a beat, dragging us over a barbed wire fence, pushing through tall tufted grasses, and asking for avgas at the local KFC. The rest of the trip he spent repairing my MacBook instead of preparing his KansasFest presentations. It was what he did; it was more important to him to help.

Tony was a great connector. Whatever you needed, Tony would find it. Hardware, software, documentation… the more obscure, the better. Many of the Apple II developments of the late 1990s involved Tony in some way, although most never knew. In 1997, we spent two days in his basement writing MacIP for Marinetti—me coding, Tony with an endless supply of confidential technical documents, random source code from other known and unknown programmers, and obscure hardware from where I still don't know.

Friendship for Tony was making you feel you were his closest friend and confidante—he made you feel important. But above all, Tony kept a lifelong passion for the Apple II which was rarely matched and was highly infectious—and it lit up a room when he entered. He will be greatly missed by all, whether they knew him or not.

Peter Neubauer

When I joined the modern Apple II community in 2009, Tony was among the first to welcome me. He sold me my first Apple II peripheral in decades. He helped recruit me to the KansasFest planning committee. I visited his home several times. He was a friend, a leader, a wealth of knowledge, and a pillar of our community.

Tony enjoyed making connections between people. At KansasFest, he treated everybody equally and helped newcomers like me become part of the long-established group. He helped me define my role and interests on the planning committee. I recall one visit where I was surprised to find Ivan Drucker already present, and how much Tony enjoyed the unexpected connection. He built a community.

Tony had a wealth of knowledge and experience, and he was eager to share. He knew the tricks and stories of somebody who had lived in the Apple II community and never left it. I remember his ability to tear down a 5.25" drive, literally spit-shine the head, and realign the drive by sound alone. He showed me how to drop a IIc just right on a table to open the case. He delighted in sharing unique prototypes and watching while I realized the significance of what I was holding. He was generous with his time and expertise.

Sometimes, I had challenges with Tony. He overpromised and rarely wanted help fulfilling those promises. Yet these same attributes were also some of his strengths—ambition, hope, and independence. We forgave each other for our missteps. Whatever your relationship with Tony, we are weaker as a community without him. I hope I can continue the vision and path Tony started and the generosity he modeled.

Max Jones

Tony Diaz was part of my Apple II experience long before I actually met him in 1996 during the founding year of *Juiced.GS*. Although I had purchased my ROM 3 IIGS in 1989, I didn't feel the full power of the computer until I started paying close attention to those who knew it best and had already pushed its limits and fully developed its capabilities.

Tony was one of those people. His technical knowledge of the IIGS and his ability to explain things clearly and thoroughly gave me the confidence to stick with it and keep trying to expand my own abilities. I followed his advice and direction in numerous articles in trade magazines, and they helped motivate me to get more out of my computer than I could imagine.

When I finally met and became friends with Tony in those early years of *Juiced.GS*, I discovered not only a smart technician, but a person who was supportive, creative, and a joy to be around.

I was awestruck when I first witnessed Tony display his homemade portable IIGS at KansasFest. It was an unforgettable experience, and he seemed to enjoy demonstrating and explaining his incredible creation as much as we enjoyed watching him.

I want today's subscribers to *Juiced.GS* to understand what Tony Diaz meant to the early life of this magazine. He was always there as a contributor and mentor. He is an important reason the publication was able to survive and thrive.

Tony was not just one of the original "friends for life" of *Juiced.GS*. He was one of those early supporters who helped make it possible and sustainable.

Rest in peace, Tony. I am eternally grateful for your support and friendship, and I will never forget you.